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SUBJECT: TOUGH LOVE IN CAMEROON'S ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN

Classified By: Political Officer Tad Brown for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Corruption, specifically the Government's faithfulness to its anti-corruption promises, continues to take center stage in Cameroon. Indeed, this was Anti-corruption Week in Cameroon, as the Prime Minister launched a high-profile seminar on how to implement the UN Anti-Corruption Convention, which Cameroon ratified earlier this year. Amidst increasingly palpable public frustration and mounting donor concern that the Government of Cameroon's (GRC) anti-corruption campaign has lost steam, the Ambassador joined other donors on December 5 to deliver a frank "tough love" message in a private meeting with Prime Minister Inoni. Welcoming such candid exchanges as evidence of donor sincerity, Inoni reviewed the GRC's progress thus far and provided details of impending actions. Speaking publicly to virtually his entire the Cabinet at the launch of the anti-corruption forum the following day, Inoni reasserted his personal commitment to advancing reform. The US, British, and Dutch Ambassadors also addressed this forum and stressed the need for action, not words. We are comforted by Inoni's continued public and personal engagement, but remain wary that success will require donor vigilance to ensure that idle talk and bureaucratic machinations are not used as cover for flaccid political will. End summary.

Donors on the Same Page

¶2. (SBU) A December 4 meeting of the "8 6 Group" (Ambassadors from the major donors and the IFIs) revealed unanimous concern about the GRC's lagging pace of reform, especially the apparent lack of political will to follow through on public commitments. It was further agreed that Executive Board meetings on December 7 (World Bank) and December 22 (IMF) provided important forums for donor representatives to convey donor disappointment and impatience with the GRC's lack of -- or, at best, slow -- progress. Having already conveyed these concerns in a strongly-worded letter to Inoni on October 13 (see full text para 7), the 8 6 Group resolved that a rump delegation should deliver a private, more frank assessment in person.

Delivering a Message of Tough Love

¶3. (C) On December 5, Ambassador Marquardt joined the Dutch Ambassador and Resreps from the UN and IMF to convey donor apprehensions. Flanked by Vice Prime Minister/Minister of Justice Amadou Ali and the Minister in Charge of State Control Siegfried David Etame Massoma (roughly equivalent to the U.S. GAO), Inoni welcomed the frank assessment as a sign of sincere concern on behalf of the donors. Seeking to reassure, Inoni reviewed the anti-corruptions progress already underway, including a civil service survey that has turned up 40,000 ghost workers and a series of judicial proceedings involving former public officials. Importantly, Inoni confided that the GRC is compiling a "short-list" of candidates to sit on the long-awaited council required to implement mandatory asset declarations for public servants, as well as naming members to the National Anti-Corruption Commission announced in March by President Biya. Inoni pointed to the standing-up of the National Agency for Financial Investigations and a growing number of state audits (up from 4 in 2005 to 23 in 2006) as evidence of the GRC's steady progress in working behind the scenes to clean up the government over the last year. Inoni concluded the meeting by vowing: "I made commitments to (World Bank President) Wolfowitz and (IMF Director) De Rato in March in Washington, and I will not let people think I was lying."

Inoni Sends a Message to His Ministers

¶4. (SBU) In a culture that traffics in subtle messages, Inoni's participation in the conference launching implementation of the UN Anti-Corruption Convention the following day, December 6, sent a clear public signal of his personal investment in the anti-corruption agenda. Inoni had been scheduled to open the conference in mid-November, but was called by President Biya to travel out of the country at the last minute. Rather than send a representative in his place as he would customarily do, Inoni requested that the conference be postponed so that he could attend personally. The political symbolism of the occasion would not have been lost on Inoni. Almost the entire Cabinet was in attendance as Ambassadors from the U.S., UK and the Netherlands and representatives from the UN, World Bank, and Transparency International delivered a unified message saluting Inoni's leadership and demanding stepped-up action. Expressing thinly-veiled expectations that corrupt senior officials, including some of the ministers present, would be dismissed and prosecuted, the donor representatives and Inoni himself made clear that the "total war on corruption" announced by Biya was not yet winding down.

Comment: Working with Inoni and Ali to Keep up the Momentum

¶5. (C) The diverse donor community is speaking with a unified voice that mirrors the frustrations expressed increasingly vocally on the Cameroonian street. We are still waiting for long-delayed actions to fulfill GRC commitments made at the beginning of the year, when pressure to reach completion point offered powerful motivation. Rumors that Ali has threatened to resign if he does not receive full backing for his on-going and pending judicial actions against corrupt officials provide reason for hope that there are enough anti-corruption activists within the government to make needed reforms. We are encouraged that Inoni and Vice PM Ali are so personally engaged on this issue, and will continue to seek ways to support their efforts. We will watch closely for Inoni's promised actions, especially to assess whether the anti-corruption commission is sufficiently empowered and truly independent.

¶6. (C) We could not help but notice Minister of Finance Polycarpe Abah Abah, widely regarded as a paragon of corruption, sitting glumly through the anti-corruption ceremony in the front row, conspicuously unmentioned in the

glowing words of praise for Inoni, Ali and other members of the Government. Abah Abah would have much to gain if the anti-corruption campaign lost steam, and his disappointment was manifest. His presence there -- like that of other of deeply tainted ministers -- was all part of the treatre of the grotesque that characterizes Cameroon's halting effort to escape from corruption: no one, no matter how complicit, misses a chance to be seen on the right side of this highly charged issue. End comment.

17. (SBU) Begin text (translation from the French) of October 13 letter from the "8 6 Group" to Prime Minister Inoni.

Excellency:

On behalf of Ambassadors and Representatives of International Organizations members of the 8 6, I wish to renew the offer of support made by our group to your government, which has embarked on a policy aimed at improving governance, particularly in the fight against corruption.

Establishing the 8 6 group has in fact been the most immediate contribution of the Cameroon's major partners in keeping with the commitment demonstrated by the Head of State to make fighting corruption a priority of the Government. At the end of almost one year of work, members of the 8 6 are convinced that a strong and continued political commitment on the part of the Government is a prerequisite in the fight against corruption.

Despite the fact that the Government has taken a number of individual actions so far, the impact of these actions, in our opinion, has not yet translated to an overall improvement of the situation.

The phenomenon of petty corruption that continues to affect the Cameroonian population each day suggests that the actions taken thus far have not ameliorated the situation. As you know, issues of governance, particularly corruption, are the main concerns and the focus of the actions of Cameroon's partners.

Our embassies often receive reports of dysfunction in the taxation services, the judiciary, the police or concerning the award and execution of public contracts. Difficulties encountered in the Hazim forestry case, which were raised in our last letter, shocked us deeply, and we are hopeful they will soon be resolved through legal proceedings in keeping with the general interest.

As you know, the political, economic and social cost of corruption is tremendous. It is highly detrimental to Cameroon's development, Cameroonian citizens' well-being and, to a greater extent, the political stability of the country. The loss of potential resources caused by Cameroon's poor rating in the domain of governance (resources from the European Union, the World Bank) or the investment climate testify to that situation.

In order to consolidate and improve upon gains already made, the Government should develop and implement a global anti-corruption strategy to which we are prepared to provide our strong support.

In this domain, more than any other, the success of this fight depends on real ownership: the fight against corruption must be the concern of all Cameroonians including political leaders, administrations, the media, and the civil society. To win this difficult fight, it will be necessary to keep the effort in the public eye, to ensure extensive public and media coverage. Though it is also concerned by the scourge of corruption, the civil society, to which we plan to provide capacity building, must play an instrumental role in the fight.

We suggest that the following concrete actions be taken quickly, at various levels:

--To establish a tripartite informal structure (comprising Cameroonian authorities, economic actors, ambassadors and representatives of international organizations) which should be a forum for regular exchange on specific difficulties encountered, notably by companies facing corrupt practices. The group suggests that this platform of dialogue and actions be established quickly, and that the 8 6 be one of the three cornerstones. The aim would be, apart from fighting corruption, to give a positive signal to private investors who face continued frustrations and harassment by various administrations which demand money from them.

--To continue with civil service census to root out ghost workers. The results of the operation, which was begun but is presently stalled, can put an end to the nepotism that plagues Cameroonian administrations and help recover sufficient funds to allow a salary increase for state employees, as part of Cameroon's agreements with the IMF.

--To pursue media campaigns on corruption cases including naming the culprits and making public the sanctions they have received. Stigmatizing corruption must create a general climate of opprobrium in order to put corrupt persons in a situation of permanent unease.

--To fully implement article 66 of the Constitution. This provides for the mandatory declaration of assets by state employees.

--To make the National Anti-Corruption Commission functional by appointing its members and providing the Commission with the means necessary for its adequate functioning.

--To carry out an appraisal of corruption in key sectors like health and education, as suggested by the multi-donor mission on the fight against corruption in Cameroon lead by OCDE/DAC. A copy of the draft report is attached.

Excellency, members of the 8 6 Group wish to once more express their deep concern to you and to discuss with you the implementation of these proposals for which, as I have already mentioned, you will have out support.

On behalf of members of the 8 6 Group, I would like to take this opportunity to renew to you, Your Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Norbert Braakhuis
Ambassador of the Netherlands (rotating chairman of the 8 6)

End text of letter.
MARQUARDT